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th anniversary story

of Berkshire Knitting Mills, Reading, Pa.



pioneers and frontiers



Ferdinand Thun



Henry Janssen



pioneers and frontiers

THERE is something very warming about the 50th year in life. Whether it's a birthday or anniversary makes no real difference. Nor does it matter whether it's a living being or a proud business enterprise. The warm and golden feeling is just the same.

That's the way it is this year with Berkshire Knitting Mills. This year finds Berkshire, the world's largest manufacturer of full-fashioned hosiery, on the threshold of its 50th and golden anniversary.

A quick look at the record of this industry over the 50 years from 1906 to 1956 would leave the impression that every one of these years was golden—a shining example of industrial growth. The case is not what it may seem.

Berkshire had a humble beginning in 1906. In its first year, the company produced 432,000 pairs of stockings. Last year, it manufactured 50,000,000 pairs of stockings.

These statistics indicate a golden growth, but a close analysis reveals that many times in the 50-year life span of the company it was necessary to work diligently to remove a tarnish which was dulling the lustre of this vast enterprise.

Teamwork and partnership have always been the answer in overcoming the obstacles which have fallen into the path of Berkshire. It was the same teamwork and partnership which brought about the birth of this textile firm in 1906.

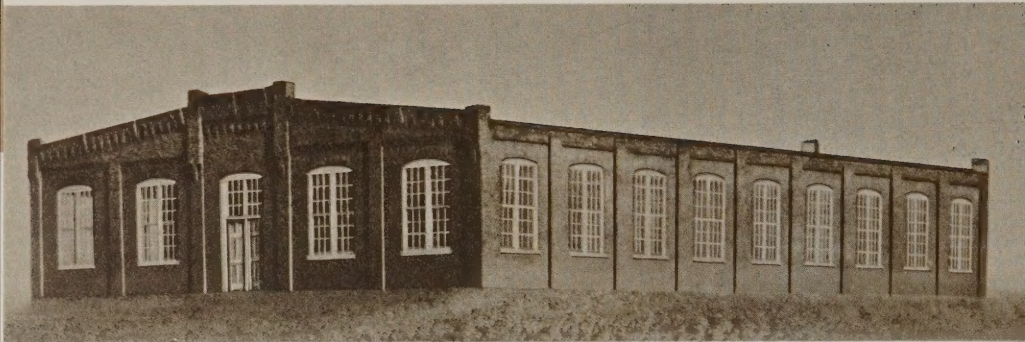
Actually, the Berkshire story goes back 90 years. It was in February 1866 that Henry Janssen and Ferdinand Thun, the founders, were born in Barmen, Germany.

They grew to adolescence in the same town, but later came to the United States individually. They met in America, however, and from this meeting eventually developed what is known as the Wyomissing Industries—Textile Machine Works, Narrow Fabric Company and Berkshire Knitting Mills.

Berkshire is the “baby” of this trio—but the “baby” is now 50 years old.



Gustav Oberlaender



Terrey Building—first permanent home of Berkshire

Mr. Thun and Mr. Janssen first concentrated their energies in the formation of Textile Machine Works. Then they wanted a separate division or department in which to test the equipment they were building. What started as an experimental department to test Textile's new line of full-fashioned knitting machines became a separate company in 1906.

The new firm was incorporated on July 12, 1906 with Gustav Oberlaender as manager. It started in humble surroundings, sharing temporary accommodations with the Narrow Fabric Company. Later it moved to the Terrey Building, and in 1908 Berkshire erected its first permanent building on ground adjoining the Textile group of buildings.

In this newly erected structure, Berkshire began knitting 33-gauge full-fashioned cotton stockings on 18-section machines. They were a far cry from the extremely fine gauge, 30-section machines of today.

The first stockings produced by Berkshire were made of cotton. Later came mercerized cotton. And it wasn't long after the start of this industry that experiments were begun with silk, a yarn which produced what was then considered a perfect stocking in wearability and appearance.

American women rapidly developed a keen appreciation of the advantages and qualities of silk. With increasing production, prices moved downward to within reach of the average working girl.

During the company's earliest years, a nation-wide trend began to lift



1906 . . . Berkshire's first stockings were 33-gauge black cotton



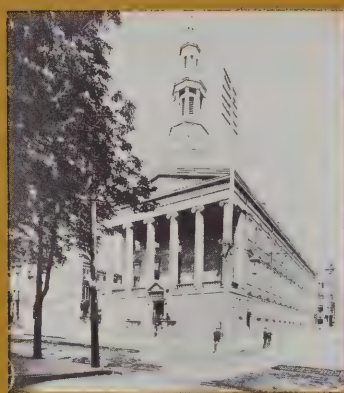
Looking east on Penn Street from Sixth



Penn Street Bridge



Looking west on Penn Street from Fourth



Court House



Post office

familiar landmarks in 1906



Vernon and Irene Castle dance team

Victorian skirts off the ground. First progress was reflected in the gradual emergence of the daring instep-length skirt. With part of the leg exposed, women wanted stockings of better appearance.

Originally, women wanted stockings to keep their legs warm. But style changes soon altered the purpose of hosiery. Women became more interested in how their legs looked than how they felt.

The Emancipation of the American woman played an important part in the move toward longer wearing, more attractive hosiery. As women found employment and greater independence, they naturally demanded better looking stockings.

Many changes and trends in the social life of this country had an immediate effect on hosiery. By 1914 the fascinating steps of Vernon and Irene Castle were inspiring millions of people to learn to dance. In the face of criticism, young women insisted on shorter skirts, prettier stockings and something more attractive than high button shoes.

World War I bolstered the American economy and strengthened the domestic hosiery industry. It was a time when riveters wore silk shirts and women wore silk stockings.

The vast expansion of the motion picture industry during World War I also helped to stimulate public demand for full-fashioned silk hosiery. American women admired the beautiful movie stars, and they lost no time trying



First Miss America pageant at Atlantic City

to look as attractive themselves. Wearing silk stockings was one way of emulating the cinema stars.

But in this hey-day of silk, stockings sold as high as \$15 a pair. And when little of the stocking was visible because of low skirts and high shoes, perfection was not necessarily needed. Furthermore, silk varied in thickness (denier) and it was difficult, if not impossible, to produce a perfect stocking in comparison with today's exacting standards. The heavy hosiery and drab colors of this period did not readily emphasize flaws.

During the 1920's the long campaign for women's suffrage ended successfully with the passage of a constitutional amendment. Girls began taking part in athletics, bicycle riding, golf, horseback riding, tennis and many other activities that were formerly the province of men only. The first Atlantic City bathing beauty contest in 1921 reversed the usually shocked attitude of the public toward the display of feminine charms.

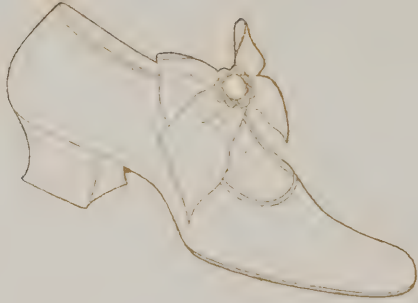
Many young women entered business and even politics. In all these new activities, women were putting their best foot forward—and generally inside a Berkshire-made silk stocking.

It was 1920 when Berkshire took the drastic step of greatly reducing the price of silk stockings. It was an action applauded by the buying public, and additional evidence in the industry that Berkshire was a leader. Many times

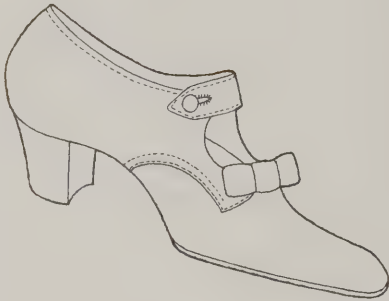
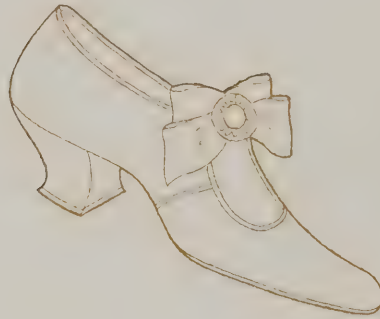


1915 . . . half silk boot





Shoe styles in the early 20's caused greater interest in hosiery



in its 50-year history, Berkshire has demonstrated its leadership, often pursuing what some consider daring precedent to set a pattern for others to follow.

The desire for sheerness was making itself felt in this period. Silk had become so flattering to the leg that skirts were steadily climbing. With the trend toward sheerness, Berkshire found it necessary to raise the gauge to 39. By 1922 it was up to 42-gauge.

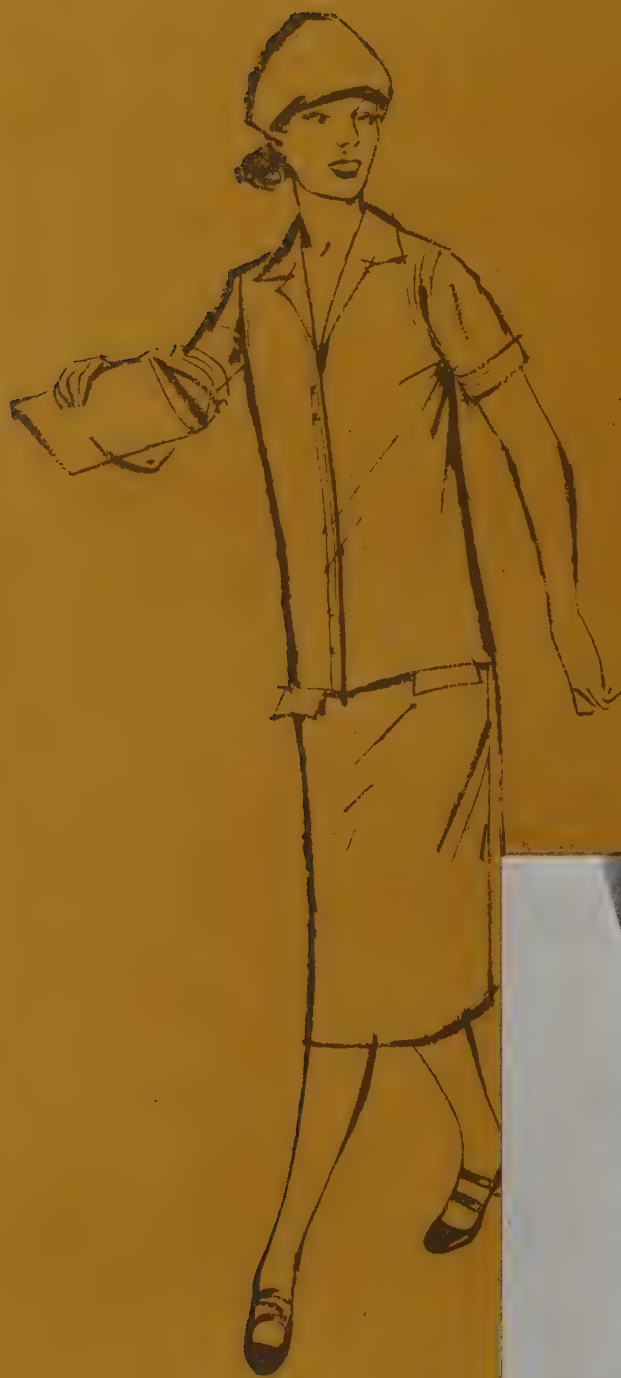
In this same period, too, shoe styles, which had a marked effect on hosiery habits, took a sharp turn for the modern. Women again rebelled against tradition and adopted the pump and oxford. This, of course, revealed the ankle and was a further stimulant to stocking sales.

Low shoes made silk stockings a vital part of the feminine wardrobe. A "popular" price then on better grades of silk stockings was \$8 a pair. That was about the entire weekly earnings of many working girls. The low shoe craze brought with it the unbuckled galoshes of the "jazz era." These encouraged the wearing of all-silk stockings even during the cold winter months.

Patent leather shoes caused a sensation in 1922. Skirts dropped a trifle, temporarily interrupting the steady rise upward. Novelty stockings came into vogue. But Berkshire never went into production of novelty stockings or "fancies" on any large scale. The mill always viewed this type of product as a quickly passing fad and fancy. And it was so right. Berkshire stuck to the conventional and respected style-setters—the plain full-fashioned stocking which had won wide acceptance.



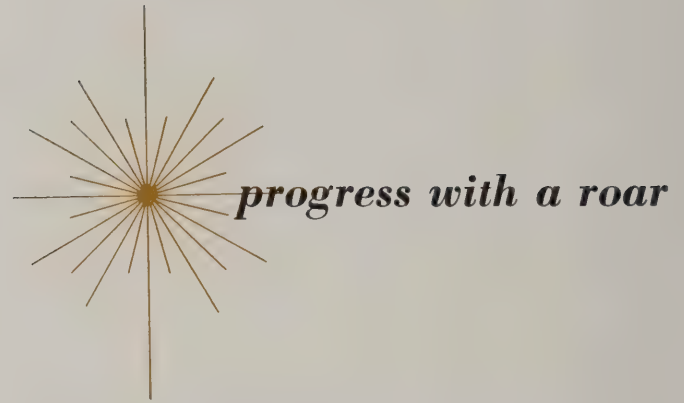
1918 . . . three-quarter silk boot



1922 . . . Pointex heels



progress with a roar



THE “Roaring Twenties” found Berkshire moving into a position of true leadership in the hosiery industry. The first 14 to 16 years had been comparatively quiet years—like those of a human reaching adolescence. The “boy” was becoming a “man.”

The first real boom came to Berkshire in this period. During these years the company expanded its production facilities many times. Nothing, in fact, roared louder in the textile business than full-fashioned stockings.

Now the trade realized that Berkshire was an organization of real stature, destined for a role of leadership through the turbulent years to follow. The basic policies of quality, fair dealing, community mindedness and fine working conditions were exerting themselves to the fullest.

Full-fashioned stockings, which not long before had been a luxury, were now a staple article of dress. The demand seemed insatiable. Production and still more production was the crying need.

In 1924, Berkshire pioneered the introduction of rayon hosiery which had the same sheen and gloss as silk stockings. This put beautiful stockings within the budgets of millions of women who could not yet afford the more expensive silk hosiery. The new rayon yarn caused a revolution in fashion.

Just three years later, the company introduced the first \$1 full-fashioned stocking made with Bemberg rayon. This was an improved synthetic fiber which opened the way to a new era of synthetics.

It was the age of “Wonderful Nonsense.” Skirts went above the knees and the “Flappers” insisted on stockings sheerer than ever. Women wanted to look their best when the breezes lifted their short skirts.

In 1927, Berkshire produced the first stocking made entirely of silk. The welt at the top of the stocking was silk as well as the leg. The square heel and the seam were black ingrain. This was the “Black Bottom” stocking, drawing its name from a dance which was then a “hit.” Afterwards came the French heel, and later the full cradle foot, which made stockings appear more



1927 . . . Black Bottom all-silk stocking



These are some of the brand names under which Berkshire stockings were sold

attractive in dress shoes.

Up to the mid-20's, the Berkshire method of selling stockings was simple. No particular selling efforts were necessary. The entire production of stockings was allocated.

Twice each year, wholesalers, distributors and even other manufacturers were *told* how much hosiery they would receive for the next six-month period. Then management had little to think about except keeping up production until the next six-month selling period arrived.

Management later realized this was folly. For it would have been possible to establish the Berkshire name solidly in all of the best stores of the nation during this time. But it was not done. The Berkshire product reached the public under a great variety of names—every name but Berkshire itself.

The industry, which had in its early days been in the hands of manufacturers and business-minded technicians, now attracted the promoter and the merchandiser. The "Roaring Twenties" were the days of the opportunists.

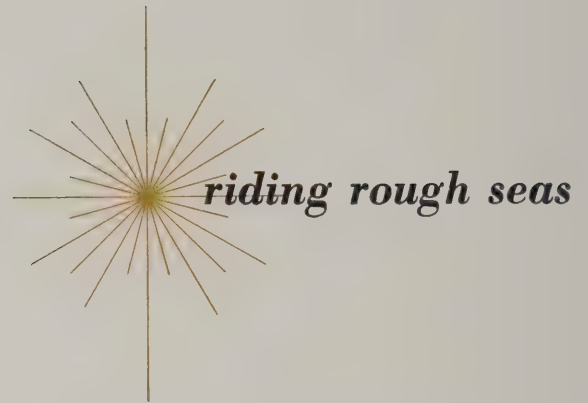
Individuals who never before had set foot inside a hosiery mill and had no knowledge of the operation were setting themselves up in business—the boom business of full-fashioned stockings. At the time, this was like striking oil in your own back yard.

To keep abreast of the rapid expansion, Berkshire in this period introduced another "first"—an extensive training program for employees in all phases of the operation. The company, in fact, served as a "training center" for a large majority of the hosiery workers in the county—a county which was then the capital of the industry. A number of these workers, not yet having completed their training, went to join the opportunists.

In about 1925, a half-hearted effort was made to introduce a Berkshire brand of hosiery, but it still appeared easier to dispose of the product through the semi-annual allocation system. The idea of pushing a Berkshire brand was a move in the right direction, but it was not pursued until nearly 10 years later.



riding rough seas



THE boom turned bust with the stock market crash in 1929. Cinderella was a pauper again.

Shortages turned into surpluses almost overnight. Profits disappeared and the hosiery business settled down to a long struggle for survival. The first mills to liquidate were those whose management had been attracted by the high profits of the boom period, and who had never built anything solid.

As the industry cut prices, it tried to cut costs, including labor. Hosiery felt the impact of the depression more than many other more stable industries because everyone looked back longingly to the high pay of the "Roaring Twenties."

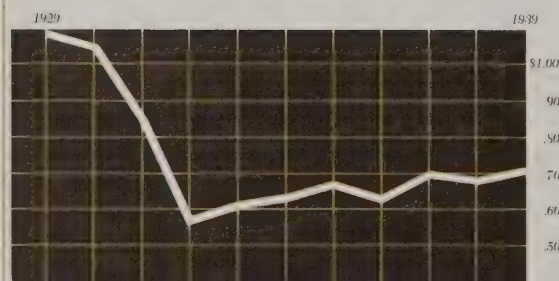
The depression days, particularly between 1930 and 1935, saw Berkshire thrashing around to gain a new lease on life. This was the first time that management found it necessary to cut back the number of employees and shorten the workweek.

The hosiery industry was something like a giant on a sickbed. Many "doctors" thought they had the answer. Bright spots would appear and then disappear.

In 1931, for example, widespread adoption of the corset created a problem of length in hosiery. It was necessary to make several different lengths of stockings to eliminate strains and runs from corset garters. Welts were widened and reinforced. But this innovation did little to strengthen the sick market.

The next year, however, mesh and net lace caused a mild sensation. This type of hosiery was acceptable even though it revealed rings. But in 1933, hosiery was made without rings. This was possible because of a new three-carrier process which produced clearness, evenness and perfect tone never before attainable. Colors looked clearer, more beautiful. And sales began to rise.

The trend toward even finer denier and higher gauge stockings was



Berkshire stocking prices per pair 1929-1939



1932 . . . mesh and net lace



Picket line during 1936 strike

becoming very evident. The extra-sheer 51-gauge stockings were soon in great demand by American women.

Berkshire entered the depression at a great disadvantage. It had lost one-third of its business with other manufacturers. Furthermore, its competitors had established themselves with strong brand names. Thus others were making gains based on years of direct selling at a time when Berkshire refused to accept such business.

It was in the early 30's, too, that the hosiery industry began to migrate to the South. The North was vexed with labor troubles and the South was offering many advantages. Production costs became out of line in the North and the South seized the opportunity of attracting the textile industry with new machinery, cheaper labor and tax concessions.

For approximately seven years after 1929, business was in a hectic stage. Losses were tremendous. In those years it took stout hearts to carry on.

As the turning point arrived—when Berkshire appeared ready to regain its second wind—a disastrous strike occurred. It was in 1936 when an all-out effort was made to organize the mill. One man who continued to work was killed. Dozens were injured. Hundreds of properties of loyal Berkshire employees were paint-bombed and otherwise damaged. Automobiles were ruined.

Picket lines at times numbered 7,000 persons, though the company employed only 6,000 people. Most of the pickets were brought in by bus from neighboring competitive plants, nearby communities, and even other states. Of the 6,000 Berkshire employees, the majority, by far, remained faithful. They braved missiles, ice picks, cat-calls and multitudes of pickets to get to their jobs. Only 300 actual employees joined the picket lines.

It was in this period of revival around 1935-36 that Berkshire made definite moves to establish itself brandwise and build an organization of its own distributors. This was finally the follow-through which had been meagerly attempted in 1925 and again early in the 1930's.





1935 . . . knee-length Snugettes

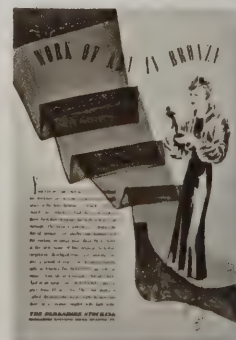
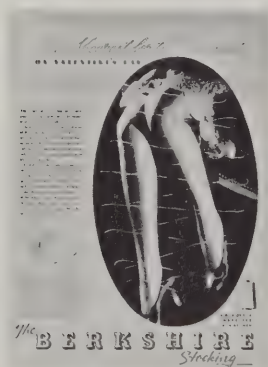
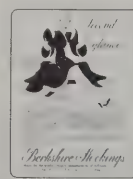
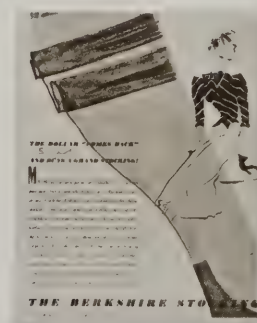
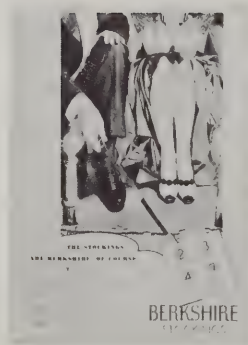
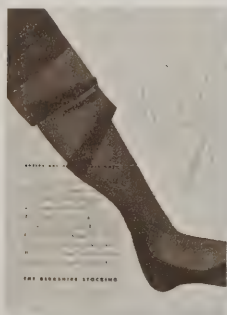


1936 . . . Kantrun run-proof stocking



First Berkshire brand box

Early advertising of the Berkshire brand



Kantrun construction keeps holes or snags from running



Prior to this move toward modern merchandising, 25 or more distributors were handling the Berkshire brand. There was much overlapping of effort. Berkshire reduced the number of distributors to 15 by confining its selling areas to their natural boundaries.

With this introduction of a sales organization, Berkshire became a brand—a brand which before long was to be known around the world. Other competitive firms had made their brands widely known and Berkshire, out of necessity, finally was doing the same.

National advertising, trade advertising and promotions were introduced. Although the Berkshire stocking had been on the market for some 30 years, it was not until this time that buyers really saw it under its own brand name.

It took several years to get the Berkshire distribution system working smoothly. Having distributors with hundreds of salesmen selling Berkshire brand stockings at last provided the distribution that justified a major advertising campaign. It was in 1934 that Berkshire announced the introduction of its own brand in a national magazine. That was the humble beginning for what is now a successful merchandising program. Berkshire has maintained this program ever since, and the Berkshire brand today is the largest selling brand in the world.

Women's fashions created interest in stocking color styling



Rockettes test Berkshire stockings




During this same period there continued a steady consumer insistence on long wear and sheerness. This led to development of the sensational Kantrun Berkshire stocking, the first run-proof stocking ever made. Kantrun, knitted with a special lock-stitch, prolongs the life of sheer silk stockings. It is knitted in such a way that a snag or a hole does not cause a tear or run in the stocking. The loop construction isolates the hole or snag, keeping it from spreading under stress.

In 1936, Berkshire introduced the Crepetwist or Berktwist stocking which combined a soft dull appearance, sheerness, increased stretch, better fit and unusually high strength. It set new company sales records, and in a dramatic wear test that year, 60 fast-stepping Rockettes in New York wore these Berkshire-made stockings for two consecutive weeks (2,971,920 steps) with relatively no signs of wear.

Gay and imaginative color combinations in women's fashions created a keener interest in the color of stockings during the late 30's. With skirts higher and legs becoming more conspicuous, color styling was a top consideration in women's fashion. With its vast experience, Berkshire helped buyers match their stockings with their clothing and accessories.

By 1937 and 1938, full-fashioned stockings were dominant in the fashion picture. But women found it hard to understand that the sheerer and finer stockings were just as durable, if not more so, than the lower gauge of earlier years. Berkshire soon proved this point. A series of tests showed that 51-gauge stockings wore five to seven times longer than heavier 39-gauge stockings.

your daily stocking mileage



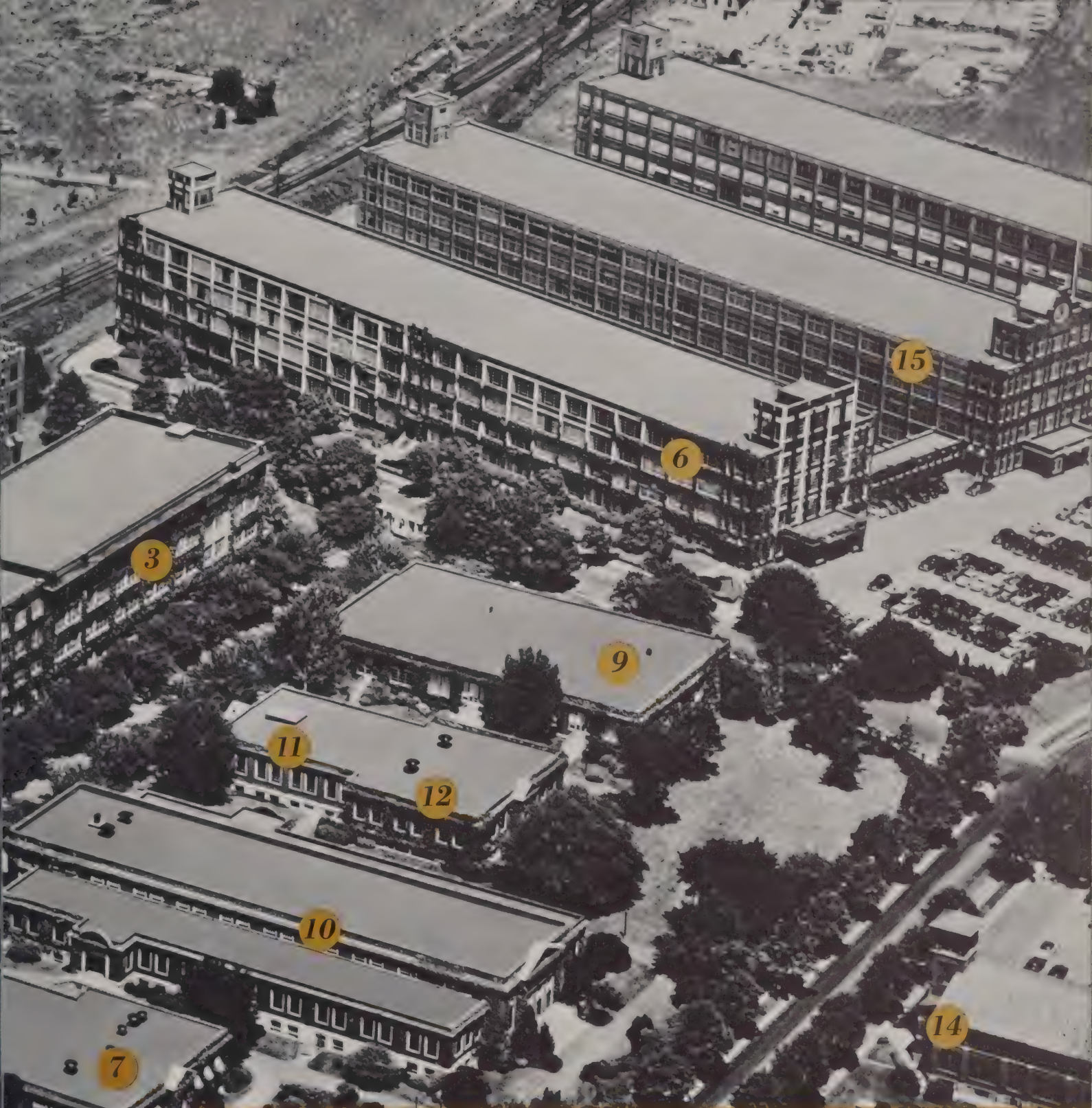
average housewife walks 7½ miles a day

business woman walks 5 miles a day

typical shopper walks 8 miles a day

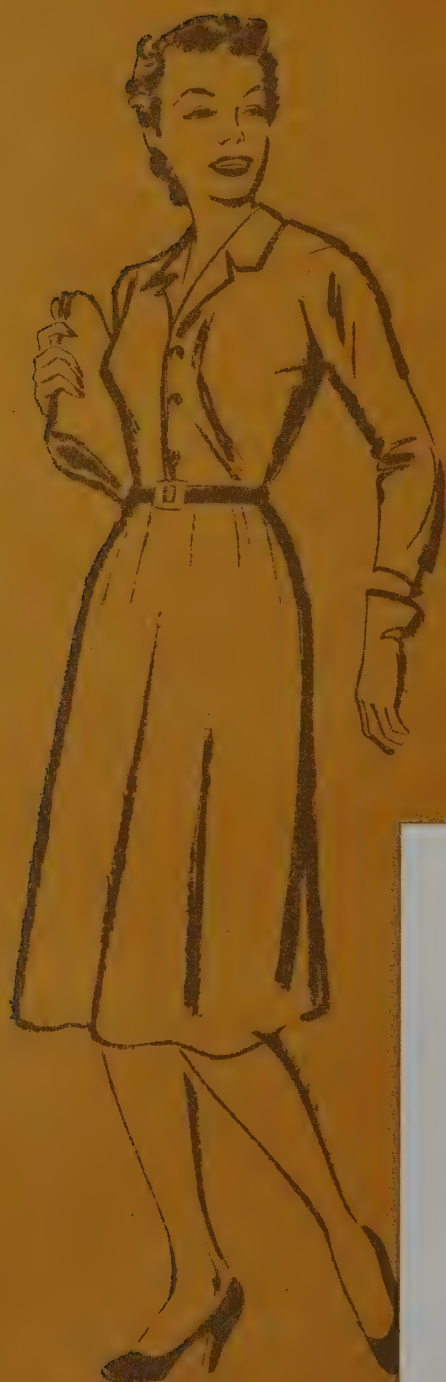
high school girl walks 10 miles a day





fifty years of steady growth, 1906-1956

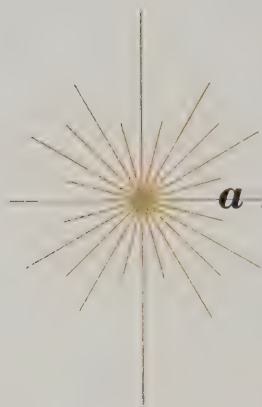
- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1 1908—Building 101, the first structure erected by Berkshire with two stories added in 1914 | 6 1923—Building 201, acquired from Narrow Fabric Company | 11 1927—Dispensary |
| 2 1916—Extension to Building 101 | 7 1925—Berkshire office building | 12 1927—Recreation hall |
| 3 1919—Concrete addition to Building 101, acquired from Narrow Fabric Company | 8 1925—West Garage for employee parking | 13 1927—Gate house |
| 4 1920—Building 106, the first finishing building | 9 1925—East Garage for employee parking (now Wyomissing Polytechnic Institute Laboratory) | 14 1927—Wyomissing Polytechnic Institute |
| 5 1922—Building 108, the second finishing building | 10 1926—Cafeteria | 15 1928—Building 202, acquired from Narrow Fabric Company |
| | | 16 1930—Building 105, the dye house, linking the two finishing buildings |
| | | 17 1951—Power plant |



1941 . . . rayon stocking of World War II vintage



a miracle... a war... and a boom



a miracle . . . a war . . . and a boom

BERKSHIRE, on its way to recovery like most of the rest of the hosiery industry, introduced the miracle of hosiery—nylon stockings—in 1938. Nylon proved to be the greatest of synthetic yarns. Its use for hosiery came only after several years of experimenting for du Pont.

Nylon! Nylon! Just how good would it be, American women asked? They were somewhat skeptical. They remembered the flurry over rayon, the first of the synthetics. Furthermore nothing, many concluded, would ever replace silk.

Silk stockings then had been reduced to cobwebby nothingness. Stockings of a few years before with 7 to 10 threads had given way to 2 and 3-thread stockings. But as fine a product as these were, they soon gave way to nylon.

Then came Autumn 1941. Silk was embargoed. The source of supply was Japan. The situation in the Pacific finally erupted into war on December 7, 1941. With America at war, silk stockings disappeared entirely. Nylons had proven their durability, but this yarn too went off to war. Women stood in line for stockings, whatever the construction. They bought anything and everything. And men stood in line for cigarettes, no matter the brand.

Bemberg rayon hosiery was re-introduced. Few knitting mills other than Berkshire had had any experience with this yarn, but the impact of war made it necessary for all to resort to this formerly used synthetic.

Even rayon yarn was on allocation, and it was still difficult to obtain because the yarn manufacturers were meeting only current demands, realizing that nylon, when again available, would take its place.

Now the opportunists reappeared. There were many “under the counter” deals for both yarn and finished stockings.

Although hosiery was in extremely short supply, Berkshire continued to advertise nationally. The name “Berkshire” had to be kept before the public so that when hosiery again became plentiful, women would not forget to seek out “sheer, sheer Berkshire” stockings.

Nylon—the miracle yarn



During the war years, the company carefully allocated its hosiery to regular customers. They realized that Berkshire was the world's largest supplier of full-fashioned stockings, and hoped that if anyone could supply them it would be Berkshire. Most of these customers have remained loyal because of the fair way they were treated, both in allocation and price.

Manufacturers who played the game honestly made reasonable profits. But the profits were staggering for the opportunists who could not resist the temptation to make excess profits even though the country was at war.

Berkshire saw 750 employees enter the armed forces, and many others leave for plants manufacturing war goods. Many of Berkshire's new rayons also went to war as the expanded Women's Army Auxiliary Corps purchased nearly a half million pairs of 45-gauge, 100-denier stockings. Another large volume was supplied to the Women Assigned to Volunteer Emergency Services (WAVES) of the U. S. Navy and other service groups.

In the early 40's the automatic welt turner was incorporated on the newest model knitting machines. This device freed the knitter from the time-consuming task of turning each welt by hand.

At about the same time, a machine was developed which eliminated topping. This led to the first round heel and the first single unit stocking. Up to this time the leg was knitted on one machine and the foot on another. They were joined by topping on a bar which was transferred to the "footer" machine. Now everything was done on one machine.

The founders of Berkshire lived to see the rise of their industry from 60 employees to more than 6,000—to witness the trials and tribulations of wars and a depression—to experience heartaches and heart throbs as markets rose and fell.

Then on January 28, 1948, just a few days before his 82nd birthday, Henry Janssen died. A little more than a year later, on March 25, 1949, Ferdinand Thun, who had reached his 83rd birthday about a month before, passed away. The vast industry was left to their heirs and descendants to carry on as the greatest competitive period in history dawned.

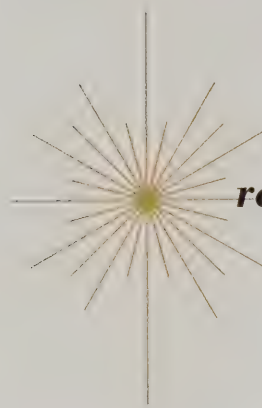
World War II ended in 1945, and for three years afterward nylon yarn continued in short supply. Business and profits were good. Stockings were in great demand. But the war flurry was waning when Berkshire paused to mourn the passing of the two industrialists who through great foresight, courage and ambition, had built one of the greatest industries Berks County has ever known.




Berkshire stockings go to war



readjustment... it goes on and on



readjustment... it goes on and on

 AFTER World War II, the hosiery industry entered a period of readjustment which continues today. This era, in fact, might even be described as “the struggle for survival.”

The end of the war brought a new flurry of investors into the industry. Mills sprang up everywhere—in basements of homes, garages and abandoned buildings. Veterans of the war were exercising priorities which enabled them to get new machines, and start in business.

A feeling prevailed that the hosiery bonanza would continue forever and would be something like the boom experienced in the “Roaring Twenties”. What was expected to be an orderly readjustment was interrupted by the mushrooming industry. Shortages quickly turned into surpluses. Hosiery prices began to sag because of the overproduction.

But then came another “spree”—the Korean War in 1951. The opportunists again envisioned a long war with shortages like those experienced during World War II. Nylon, however, was not removed from the domestic market during this conflict. The “boom” lasted only about six months.

Then the industry found itself again in a highly competitive situation. The productive capacity of the industry was such that it manufactured more stockings than women could wear. Prices slipped and hosiery began to pile up.

Something had to give, and give it did. One by one, mills began to liquidate. First hundreds and then eventually thousands of Reading and Berks County residents who had found their livelihood in the hosiery industry, were out of jobs.

But at Berkshire, the descendants of Mr. Janssen and Mr. Thun, carrying on the family tradition of cooperative partnership, had faith in the future. In 1950, Berkshire announced that it would spend \$10,000,000 as the first step in a modernization program. This money was spent for the newest and most modern machinery, for improving production facilities and for bettering working conditions.



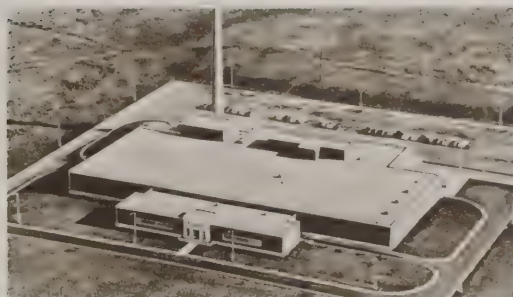
Hugo Hemmerich



East London, Union of South Africa



Newtownards, Northern Ireland



Andrews, N. C.

It was in 1952 that death came to Hugo Hemmerich, a member of Berkshire's official family, and known to thousands of workers and hundreds more in the trade. Mr. Hemmerich joined the firm in its infancy as superintendent of production, and rose to the position of vice president.

In an effort to stay in the world markets, Berkshire established its first foreign operation in East London, Union of South Africa.

Then, in 1951, came the first domestic expansion at Andrews, N. C.

Still later, three other foreign operations were instituted—at Newtownards, Northern Ireland; Bogota, Colombia, and Pforzheim, Germany. In addition, plans are under way for the establishment of a Berkshire mill in Madrid, Spain.

Some of the machinery being replaced at the main plant in Wyomissing is shipped to the foreign mills as the firm continues its policy of installing 10 per cent new equipment in Reading each year. All of the hosiery manufactured abroad is sold in foreign markets. It does not compete with the product and the jobs of people of Berks County.

While Berkshire was undertaking this program of world expansion, the competition at home was growing through mergers and consolidations. New giants were emerging.

Berkshire continued building for the future last year by acquiring a new division—Nomend Hosiery Company, with well established distribution in many fine stores throughout the nation.

Meanwhile, the popularity of seamless stockings began rising sharply early in 1954. Berkshire, always known and respected as a full-fashioned hosiery producer, hesitated to enter this new field. But market demands



Bogota, Colombia



Pforzheim, Germany

	<i>Plants</i>	<i>Employees</i>
1906	Reading	3,500
	Andrews, North Carolina	350
	East London, South Africa	500
	Newtownards, Northern Ireland	700
	Pforzheim, Germany	625
	Bogota, Colombia	75

1956

Berkshire working force has grown from 60 to nearly 6,000 employees

dictated its action.

The company decided to set up a seamless division, and production on a minor scale was started by late 1955. Berkshire is now planning to install more than 400 machines, and has made provision for space to accommodate up to 1,000 machines.

Berkshire missed the seamless boom. When the decision was made to produce this type of stocking, machines were extremely scarce. Seamless machine producers had long waiting lists. The best Berkshire could do was "get on the list." The company is still "on the list" today, receiving machines as manufacturers' quotas permit.

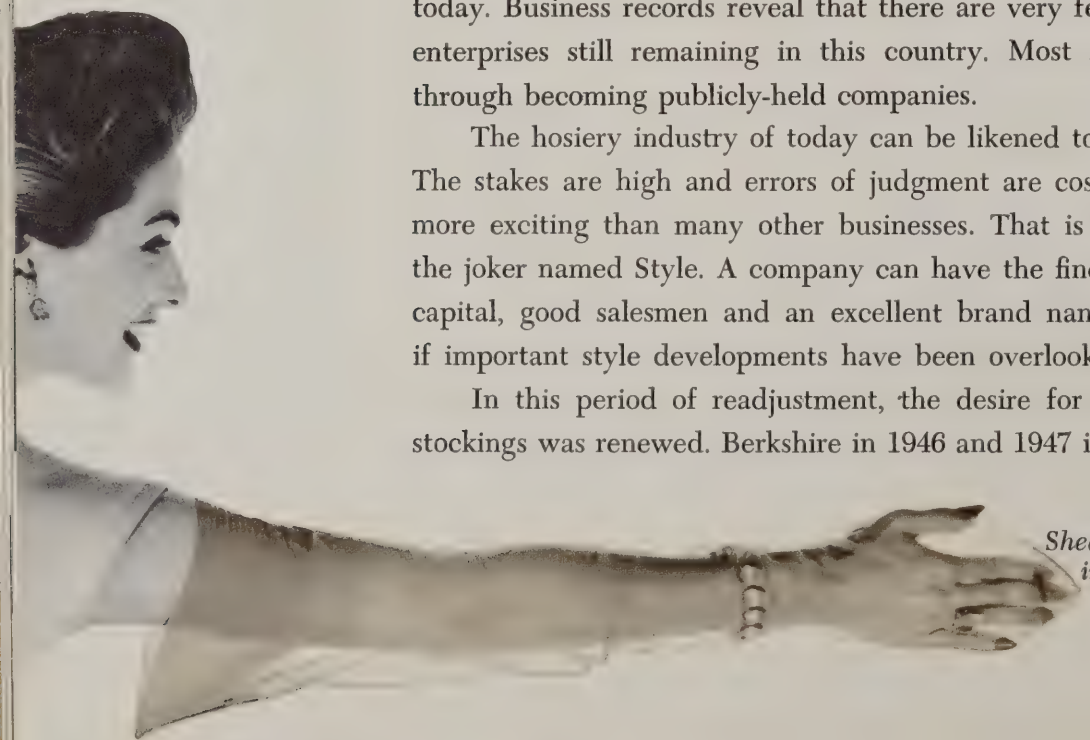
Undaunted planning and firm faith in the future have preserved Berkshire Knitting Mills as the last "big mill" in Reading and, indeed, in the entire North.

This ability to survive is a tribute to a company's family tradition. Berkshire was started in 1906 as a family affair. And it continues that way today. Business records reveal that there are very few large family-operated enterprises still remaining in this country. Most firms have grown large through becoming publicly-held companies.

The hosiery industry of today can be likened to an exciting card game. The stakes are high and errors of judgment are costly. One thing makes it more exciting than many other businesses. That is the joker in the deck—the joker named Style. A company can have the finest machinery, plenty of capital, good salesmen and an excellent brand name—and still be helpless if important style developments have been overlooked.

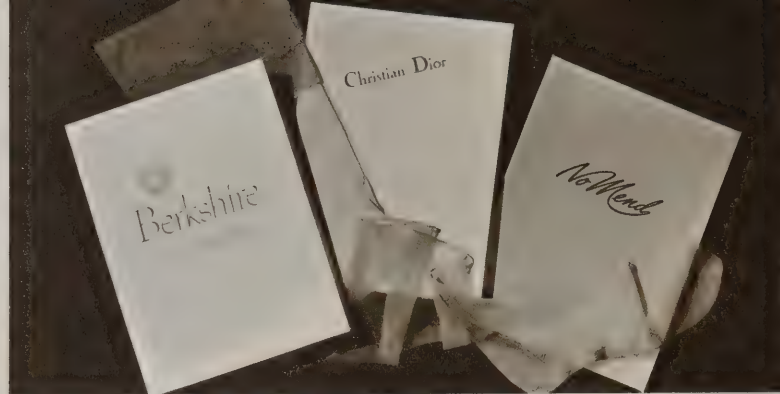
In this period of readjustment, the desire for sheerer, more beautiful stockings was renewed. Berkshire in 1946 and 1947 introduced full-fashioned

*Sheerness was and still is demanded
in beautiful women's stockings*





1956 . . . seamless hosiery



A style trio without peer

nylons in deniers of 30, 20 and 15. These are extremely thin when you consider that the average human hair is about 30 denier in thickness.

Just a few short years ago, 1948, Berkshire introduced its first 60-gauge hosiery. The following year the company introduced 10-denier yarn in its 60-gauge hosiery. This was not the end. In 1950, 66-gauge stockings made their debut. And in 1955, the 75-gauge stocking made its appearance.

Berkshire in 1952 and 1953 introduced its currently popular Kantrun Nylace top and toe-ring. The top or welt and the toe-ring are knitted in such a manner that a snag or run will stay in the unseen area without spreading into the main portion of the stocking. These features are exclusive in the Berkshire branded line, and main points in the company's advertising and promotion. The inclusion of these features is an important development. When reinforcements are included in such areas as the toes, sole or heel, the added strength is incorporated in such a way that it is not visible. This is important because of the great popularity of toe-out, heel-out shoes.

During the same period, too, came another improvement in full-fashioned production methods. A device was perfected which eliminated looping. Before this improvement, the stocking came off the knitting machine with the toe open. This opening had to be looped or sewn in a separate operation. The new attachment closes the toe area while the stocking is still on the knitting machine.

Berkshire's top style rating was re-affirmed in 1955 when the world-famous Christian Dior engaged the company to develop a special line of stockings to complement his latest fashions. They were made in colors and styles specified by Dior personally. All are distinguished by the famed Dior tapering heel.

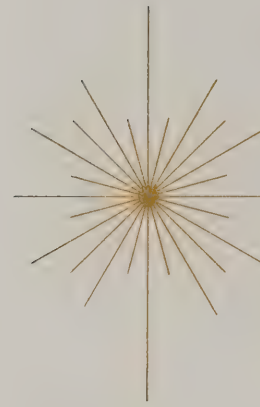
In response to women who demanded a snugger fit in hosiery, Berkshire began making stockings from sheer stretch yarns.

These stockings are self-adjusting to the shape of the leg. Since they stretch in any direction, they cling to the leg.





a good place to work



a good place to work

ONE of the best ways to tell how employees feel about their company is to determine how long they have stayed on the job. The membership in Berkshire's Quarter Century Club gives a quick measure. More than 875 of the company's current 3,500 Reading employees—or approximately 1 out of 4—are members of this honored group by virtue of 25 years or more service.

Berkshire is sincerely and deeply grateful for this display of loyalty, and everlastingly proud of all the thousands of fine employees who have been or still are members of the Berkshire family.

This record of employee loyalty did not happen by chance. From the very beginning, the partners tried to make Berkshire as good a place to work as possible. Their ideas on employee relations are carried on today, and on a much broader scale.

Berkshire's entire family of employees receives free life insurance under a group plan in effect since 1917. For every employee, the company pays the full cost of Blue Cross hospital service and Blue Shield surgical benefits. It shares the cost as well for medical expenses incurred by all members of the Berkshire Employees Benefit Association. This association, which elects its own officers, provides benefits for sickness, accidents and disability. It is a voluntary organization which provides protection for the employee and, at nominal cost, his entire family.

A fixed proportion of annual profits is devoted each year to an employees' profit-sharing retirement plan. This plan pays yearly annuities to eligible employees who have reached 65 and have retired.

Through the years, Berkshire has gained an enviable reputation for its high standards of employment, safe and sanitary working conditions, and opportunities for training and advancement.

Another proud heritage of the company is its beautiful grounds. Visitors have often remarked that the landscaping is more like that of a college campus or municipal park than that of a large industry. Cherry blossoms in the





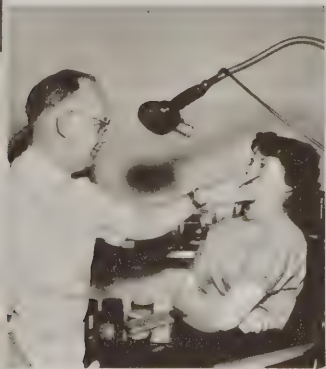
Low cost home-cooked meals are prepared for employees in the cafeteria



Berkshire Meadows gives employees their own private playground for outdoor fun



Recreation hall offers many opportunities for indoor pastime



A modern dispensary, fully staffed, is equipped for everyday and emergency medical duties

Spring, lawns carpeted with thick green grass, ivy-draped buildings, stately trees, graceful shrubs, fine clean walks—all blend in natural, cultured beauty.

Employees can buy delicious “home-cooked” meals in the company’s non-profit cafeteria at unusually low prices. This is possible because the company pays part of the operating expense.

Berkshire in cooperation with Textile Machine Works and Narrow Fabric Company operates one of the best and most fully equipped dispensaries in the State of Pennsylvania. Since its foundation in 1917, it has administered many thousands of on-the-job emergency treatments to ill and injured employees. It would rather prevent than cure, but if that is not possible, a staff of 16 physicians, specialists, nurses and technicians is prepared at all times for any sort of emergency.

To encourage hard play as well as hard work, the company has developed a large 36-acre tract for employee and family recreation. This area, known as Berkshire Meadows, is about seven miles from Reading along the Tulpehocken Creek. A large recreation hall adjoining the dispensary building gives employees a place to go for indoor pastime. Here they hold dances, parties, banquets, show movies and play records during lunch hours.

An important builder of team spirit is the company’s well known employee publication, *THE YARN CARRIER*. This magazine, edited in the highest standards of journalism, brings to employees news about themselves and their company.



being a good neighbor



being a good neighbor

HOSIERY and Berkshire Knitting Mills have played a prominent role in the history of Reading and Berks County. This area for many years was known throughout the world as the hub of the hosiery industry. During recent years, in fact, as much as 20% of the nation's full-fashioned stockings was made in this community.

This is part of a glorious past. But equally important is the way in which Berkshire and the original partners always shared the fruits of success with the community of Greater Reading. Mr. Janssen and Mr. Thun never lost sight of their responsibilities to the community. Nor have their successors.

While its growth in physical size is important, Berkshire is even happier with what it has been able to contribute to the welfare of man—and to the economy of the community and nation. Berkshire's growth during the last half century has opened many opportunities for allied industries. It has created thousands of new jobs, made possible better living conditions, and stimulated growth of a bigger and more prosperous community.

For many years the company and the two partners, as individuals, have carried out a generous and carefully considered community welfare program. As a matter of basic policy, the company has always tried to make sure that whatever it does works to the best interest of the public.

Many local causes and institutions have benefited from Berkshire financial aid. With Berkshire playing an important part, the Wyomissing Industries have given away more than eight million dollars in Berks County. Principal beneficiary has been The Reading Hospital, which has received over four million dollars in direct grants. With this help, the hospital has become one of the finest, most modern in the country.

Berkshire has contributed periodically to the Reading Museum and Art Gallery, the Wyomissing Public Library, and the Historical Society of Berks County. The company financed construction of the busy Buttonwood Street Bridge and sponsored major improvements in the Borough of Wyomissing—



Reading Hospital, one of the finest in Pennsylvania



Buttonwood Street Bridge alleviated a traffic problem



Reading Museum for cultural growth and enjoyment



Wyomissing Library for education, reference, relaxation



Historical Society of Berks County with its archives of the past

which this year is also celebrating its 50th Anniversary.

Mr. Thun and Mr. Janssen both helped organize the first Wyomissing Borough government. They served on the borough council until shortly before their deaths, and helped materially in the development of the community—widely considered one of the most beautiful residential areas in Pennsylvania.

Together with the rest of the Wyomissing Industries, Berkshire co-established the Wyomissing Polytechnic Institute and thus gave Reading a highly accredited junior college. The company has also contributed generously to the Community Chest, Red Cross and countless other worthwhile charities.



facing the next 50 years

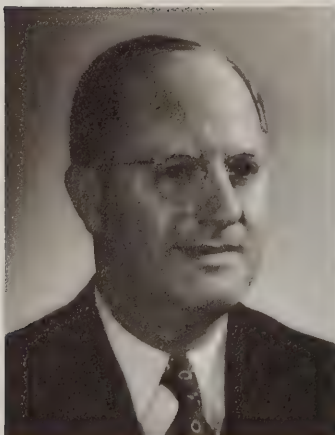
Officers



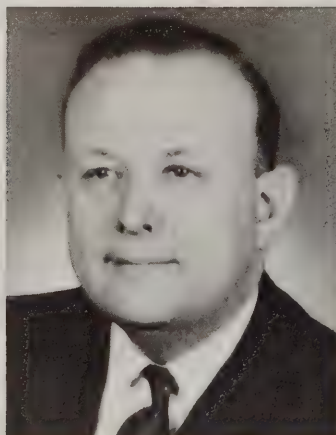
Ferdinand K. Thun, Chairman of the Board



John W. Bowman, President



*William C. Brenner
Vice President
Manufacturing*



*Henry M. Fidler
Vice President, Sales*



*Paul E. Guenther
Vice President
Foreign Operations*



*John J. O'Connell
Vice President, Finance*

Board of Directors



Ferdinand K. Thun



John W. Bowman



Frederick G. Bollman



George J. Meng

future promise

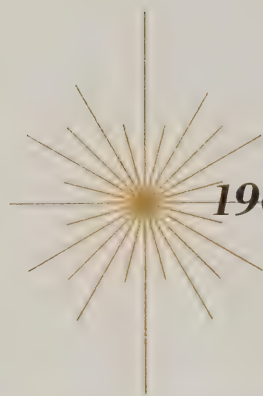
Berkshire faces the future with confidence and optimism. Yet the future still presents problems and hazards. Competition remains aggressive and the struggle for business is never-ending.

But it is Berkshire's determination to continue on its road of progress. There will be further expansion programs, new construction and new jobs.

It is with this promise for the future that Berkshire ends its first 50 years.



Mrs. Frieda Lotz, active employee



1906 pioneers who served longest



Herbert Potteiger, retired 1953



Isaac Whitman, retired 1953



Clayton Trenkle, retired 1954





sheer, sheer Berkshire stockings for the loveliest legs in the world

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